

SNSF Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC)

Newsletter 2021/1

Status of the study

The SNSF Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC) study has started its 4th year now and has so far introduced three cohorts, with a fourth one coming up. In fall 2020, we administered the base survey with the second part of the CTC-20 cohort, the first follow-up survey with the second part of the CTC-19 cohort, and the second monitoring survey with the CTC-18 cohort. **We thank all survey participants for their valuable contribution to this study!**

This newsletter focuses on the effects of the measures that were taken to combat COVID-19 on researchers' daily lives, research work, and career prospects. The results presented in the following stem from a special module added to the surveys that were conducted in fall 2020. The module questions mainly referred to the participants' experiences during the first wave of the pandemic, roughly in spring 2020.

First results on the effect of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19

The survey participants

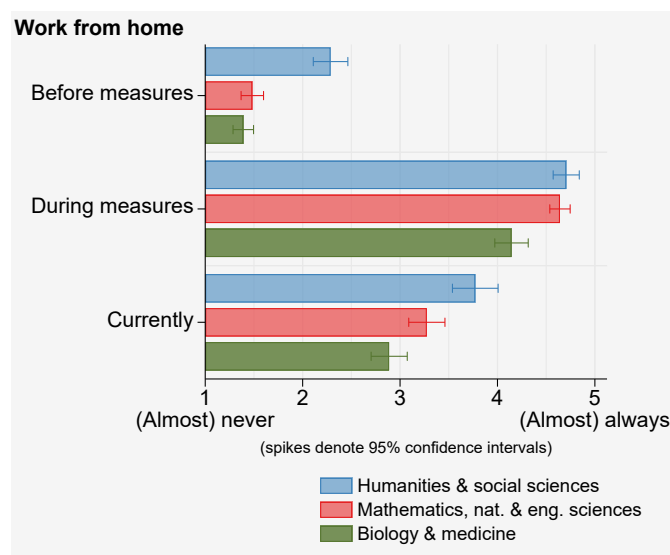
The participants of the surveys conducted in fall 2020 are (former) applicants for Early Postdoc.Mobility and Postdoc.Mobility. Surveys were conducted with the CTC-18, CTC-19, and CTC-20 cohorts. The CTC-18 cohort comprises 450 people; 415 were invited to take part in the Monitoring 2 survey in fall 2020, of which 292 (70%) completed the survey. The CTC-19 cohort in-

cludes 470 people, of whom 360 were invited to take the Monitoring 1 survey and 286 (79%) completed. Lastly, the CTC-20 cohort includes 496 applicants, 337 of them were invited to participate in the base survey, of which 303 (90%) complied. Due to prior participation, parts of the CTC-19 and CTC-20 cohorts were not invited to take the respective survey.

Increase of work from home

In fall 2020, almost all of the survey participants reported that extraordinary measures had been taken against COVID-19 where they were living. Only 1% reported that no measures had been taken. The survey participants were asked how often they worked from home before and during the period of COVID-19 measures, as well as at the time of the survey, on a scale from 1 to 5. On average, the participants reported that they almost never worked from home before the pandemic (mean = 1.6), but almost always during the first wave (mean = 4.5). At the time of the survey, in fall 2020 (when many countries were affected by a second wave), they still often worked from home (mean = 3.2). Among those who were conducting research in their job at the time, there are differences between research domains in terms of how often people worked from home. During the first wave, researchers in the humanities and social sciences and researchers in mathematics, natural and engineering sciences worked

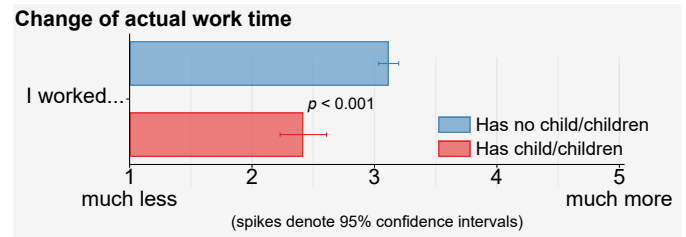
from home more often than those working in biology and medicine.



Parents worked slightly less than usual

The survey participants further reported whether their work time changed during the period of COVID-19 measures. They were asked to indicate changes on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. On average, the amount of time spent working did not change much compared to before the pandemic (mean = 3.0). However, while participants who do not have children worked about the same as usual (mean = 3.1), participants with children worked less than usual (mean = 2.4). This difference between participants with children and participants without children is significant ($p < 0.001$).

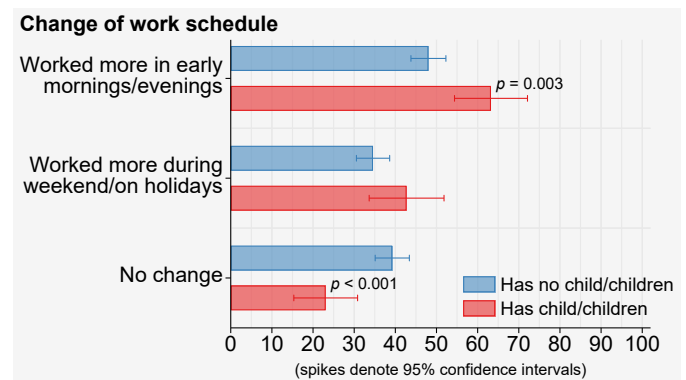
This finding applies to both women and men. However, mothers worked slightly less than fathers (mean = 2.3 vs. mean = 2.6, $p = 0.092$).



Many shifted their working hours

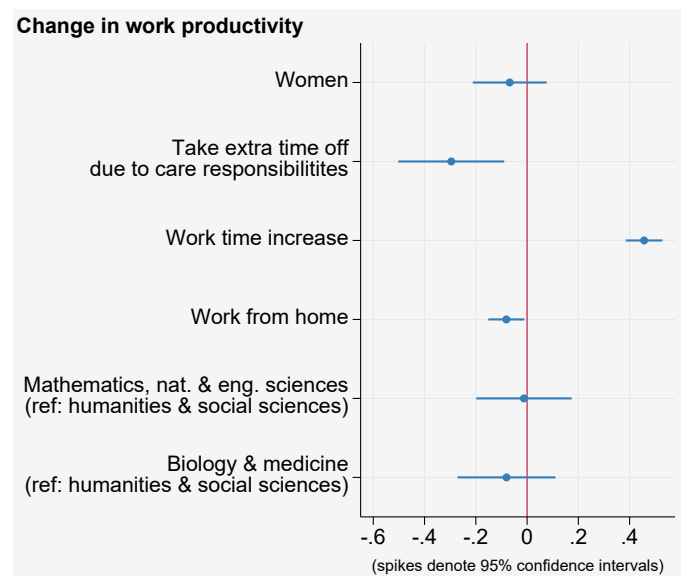
In addition to the amount of time people spent working, we also asked about potential changes in the participants' work schedules (multiple answers were possible). Half of the participants (51%) reported working more often in the early morning and/or in the late evening. Moreover, 36% indicated working on the weekend and/or during the holidays more often. Furthermore, there is a relation between shifts in the work schedule and being a parent. In fact, 63% of the participants with children reported shifts to mornings and/or evenings, compared to only 48% of the participants without children ($p = 0.003$). Similarly, parents shifted their work time to weekends and/or holidays a little more often than people without children (43% vs. 35%), though this difference is not significant. At

the same time, participants without children reported that their work schedule did not change more often than parents (39% vs. 23%, $p < 0.001$).



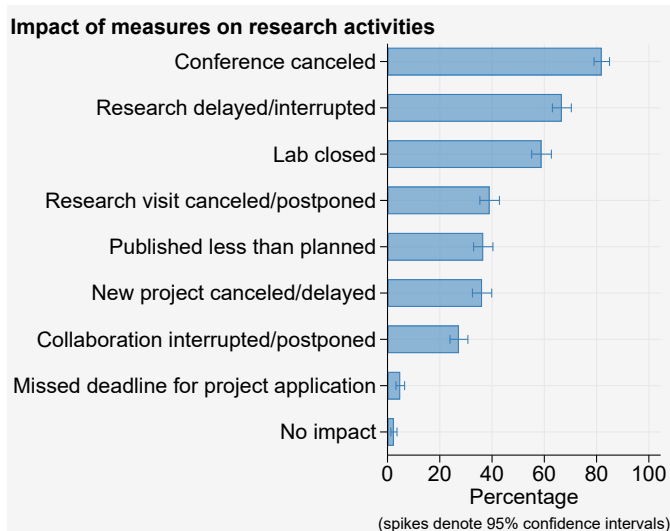
Reduced work productivity

The respondents further reported whether their work productivity changed on a scale from 1 to 5, with 3 meaning no change in productivity. Both male respondents (mean = 2.6) and female ones (mean = 2.4) indicated that their productivity was somewhat limited in spring when restrictions were in place. Our multivariate model shows that changes in self-estimated work productivity are clearly related to changes in work time. People who had to take extra time off due to care responsibilities experienced a decrease in work productivity of -0.3 scale points ($p = 0.005$), whereas an increase in work time resulted in a significant increase of productivity (0.5 scale points, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, working from home is related to a slight decrease in self-reported productivity (-0.1 scale points, $p = 0.025$). There are no differences between research domains.



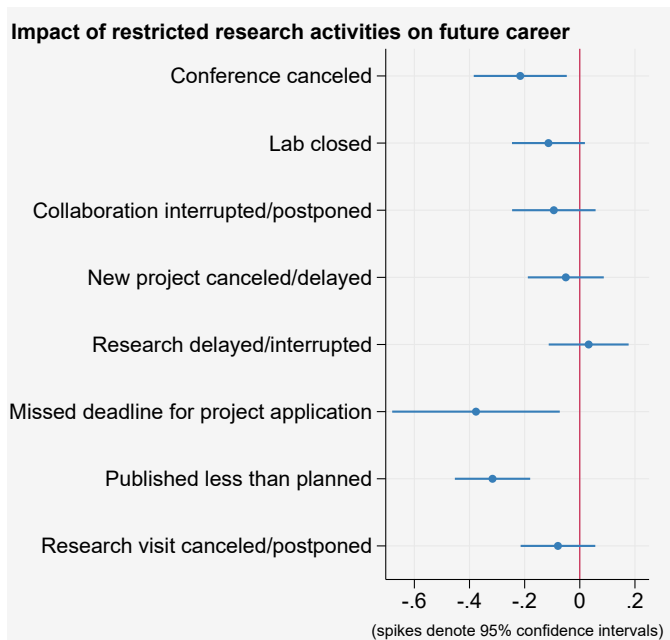
Restricted research activities

Almost all participants reported effects of the COVID-19 measures on their research activities (multiple answers were possible). Canceled conferences were the most often cited consequence (82%). Current research was delayed or interrupted for 67%. Many reported that their lab was closed (59%, note that participants may have understood this item to include archives, libraries, and offices). More than a third of the participants had to cancel or postpone a research visit or exchange (39%), published less than initially planned (37%), and had to cancel or postpone the start of a new research project (36%). Furthermore, 27% could not continue existing collaborations or start planned ones, and 5% missed deadlines for project applications. Finally, merely 2% of all survey participants indicated that they experienced no impact.



Negative career prospects

We also asked the respondents whether they think that the extraordinary situation caused by the COVID-19 measures will have an impact on their future careers, and if so, whether negative or positive. Overall, the participants expect a negative effect on their future careers (mean = 2.4, on a scale from 1 to 5, with 3 meaning no effect). As shown above, they were confronted with several restrictions in their academic activities. Results of a multivariate model show that four aspects are negatively related with the researchers' perceived career chances. People who reported that conferences were canceled (-0.2 scale points, $p = 0.012$), who published less than planned (-0.3 scale points, $p < 0.001$), whose lab was closed (-0.1 scale points, $p = 0.092$), and people who missed application deadlines (-0.3 scale points, $p = 0.015$) rated the negative effect on their careers higher than those who were less affected by these restrictions. Other aspects are also correlated with career prospects, but not significantly.



Up next

We are looking forward to launching the CTC-21 cohort with the base survey in spring 2021. Moreover, we will invite the participants of the CTC-19 and CTC-20 spring

cohorts to take part in their first or second follow-up surveys. These surveys target people who applied for (Early) Postdoc.Mobility, Ambizione, Eccellenza, and PRIMA.

The Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC) project of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) is a longitudinal panel study with yearly cohorts. It aims at tracking the career paths of young researchers applying for SNSF career funding schemes at the postdoctoral level (Early Postdoc.Mobility, Postdoc.Mobility, Ambizione, Eccellenza, and PRIMA). The main goals of the CTC are to monitor the careers of these researchers and to evaluate the impact of the different career funding schemes of the SNSF. As of 2021 the Career Tracker Cohorts study is affiliated to the Interfaculty Centre for Educational Research (ICER) at the University of Bern.

For more information see: <http://careertrackercohorts.ch/>

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